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The Speech Choir in Central European Theatres and Literary-Musical Works in the First Third of the 20th Century

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Abstract
Speech choirs emerged as an offshoot of the choral gatherings of a wider youth musical and singing movement in the first half of the 20th century. The occasionally expressed opinion that choral speaking was cultivated primarily by the Hitler Youth and pressed into service on behalf of Nazi nationalist and racist propaganda is, historically, only partially accurate. The primary forces of choral speaking in Germany were, from 1919, the Social Democratic workers' and cultural movement and the Catholic youth groups, in addition to elementary and secondary schools. The popularity of speech choirs around 1930 was also echoed in the music of the time. Compositions for musical speech choirs were produced by composers like Heinz Thiessen, Arnold Schönberg, Ernst Toch, Carl Orff, Vladimir Vogel, Luigi Nono, Helmut Lachenmann and Wolfgang Rihm. Moving forward from the Schönberg School, the post-1945 new music thereby opens up the spectrum of vocal expressions of sound beyond that of the singing voice. It does so not only for solo voices but for the choir as well.

Keywords
Speech Choir, spoken-word-movement, contemporary music, Luigi Nono, Helmut Lachenmann.

I. The Speech Choir after the First World War

If one disregards the choirs of ancient Greek theatre and the Catholic liturgy, as well as individual reminiscences in the dramas of German Classicism (for example Schiller's *Die Braut von Messina*[2] and Goethe's *Faust*), the speech choir emerged only in the first half of the 20th century as an offshoot of the choral gatherings of a wider youth musical and singing movement. They experienced a brief and turbulent ascendancy in the years immediately following the First World War, as calls for camaraderie, for the "spiritual work of the individual within a community" (Heinrichs 1928: 25; Bethge 1926:

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[2] On the performance of Schiller's tragedy in July 1803 in Berlin's Königliches Nationaltheater with choirs, see Carl Friedrich Zelter's letter to Goethe from July 9, 1803 (Goethe 1998: 38–41).

6),[3] were being heard everywhere. The agent of this movement was a generation of Expressionists who, in their creed, parted company with the individualism of the liberal bourgeois age to seek collective expression for all humanity. The spoken-word choir appeared to be the ideal medium for this expression. Theatre directors including Max Reinhardt and Erwin Piscator experimented with choral speech in their productions of ancient tragedies and modern political dramas. That spark, in turn, inspired choral speech movements independent of the theatre, supported by the Social Democratic Party on the one hand and the youth groups of the Catholic Church on the other. Alongside musical choirs, choral speaking was used for the purposes of strengthening communities and asserting political-ideological views. Meanwhile, the spoken-word choir flourished in elementary and secondary schools as a means of training speech and declamation (see Drach 1929: 182).

The speech choir represents an idiosyncratic hybrid, a cross between the choral singing movement and the theatre, mass spectacle and rituals of political or religious avowal, of art and instruction. Neither theatre studies nor musical history have yet fully embraced the phenomenon. Even for scholarly cultural and historical studies it remains a largely unexplored field, with the exception of a handful of works on the choral speaking movement of the German and Russian proletariats (see Will and Burns 1982; Clark 1984; Brang 2007–2008; Bendel 2004). Its history remains essentially unwritten; those seeking to do so must commit to a time-consuming search through widely scattered source material.[4] Within it, aesthetic intent interacts in a complex manner with the objectives of both speech training and political and religious ideology. The choir is a group phenomenon that requires the coordination of individual voices into a chorus of equals (Heinrichs 1928: 10). There can be no spoken-word choir without community action and spirit – unless it is restricted to purely declamatory goals. It is the "given means of declaring matters of the

[3] "Speech choir work had its inception in the new social ideal of community co-operation which followed on the World War." Those are the words of an American observer of German speech choirs, Sophie W. Downs (1936: 669).

[4] The most useful source texts are from the practitioners of the choral speaking movement, especially from educators and elocution trainers, of whom the following provide the basis for the present study: Johannesson 1929; Roedemeyer 1926; Heinrichs 1928: 25; Bethge 1926: 6; Hahn 1928: 9; Drach 1929; Simon 1927; Türk 1933; Mönckeberg-Kollmar 1925: 30; Peuler 1932a: 750–756; 1932b; Leyhausen 1934a; 1934b; Downs 1936: 669; Binder 1931: 53–57; Banke 1937; Weller 1957: 218. The work by Roedemeyer (1926), a lecturer of elocution and public speaking at the Universtity of Frankfurt, unfortunately fails to deliver anything its title suggests. The author obsessively evaluates and judges the choral speaking initiatives of his time without elucidating his own concept. Its disclosure is in any case obscured by a confusing train of thought, an associative writing style and boastful gestures.

community as a community," as Ernst Heinrich Bethge, a leading practitioner in the choral speech movement in the 1920s, put it: "One stands together. One turns one's eyes and mind to something communal. Word rings in word, gesture reaches into gesture. The self becomes a cogwheel that moves another cogwheel" (1926: 7; see also Bethge s.a.). Even the audience that this "modern liturgy" addresses must likewise be "attuned" as one. Barriers between stage and seating are supposed to fall as performers and audience merge into a single collective sense and "community of conviction" (Heinrichs 1928: 10). The moment this mutual resonance is no longer ensured, the choir loses its grounds for existence. "The speech choir is a new means toward communality, an instrument for expressing clearly and ardently that which the individual is incapable of saying," as Bethge portrayed it (1926: 8).

To attain this communal effect, the choir cannot be merely a "multiplied individual expression" (Hahn 1928: 9) of texts that could also be enunciated by individual speakers. The only suitable texts are those that bring a "sense of religious, ethical or national community" to expression (Drach 1929: 181).[5] This, of course, touches upon the sore point that has made choral speaking suspect since 1930, and especially today: the mass psychological identification of the individual with a loud collective that constantly refers to "us" and refuses to accept the individual's deviations – all elevated to an art form. This also includes the disciplining of the individual by the group in a quasi-liturgical or -military manner.[6]

This kind of art, performed by communities and aimed at furthering community, stayed vibrant as long as the spiritual shocks and ideological resonances of the First World War continued to echo and resound, like the motifs of the youth movement. The occasionally expressed opinion that choral speaking was cultivated primarily by the Hitler Youth and pressed into service on behalf of Nazi nationalist and racist propaganda[7] is, historically, only partially accurate. The

[5] As Drach rightly stresses, every speech choir must be founded on "communal feeling and wanting": "A true mass of people must laugh, celebrate, fear, be horrified" (Ibid).

[6] "[…] because our time is a time of mass liberation and simultaneously of mass disciplining. What would then be more appropriate to not only sing songs together, but to enunciate our common thoughts together in verse? Again it was the youth that appropriated the new means of expression, and used the choir in public celebrations and confessional ceremonies" (Bethge 1926: 25). Himself a writer of speech choir verse, Bethge helped expand the repertoire of the choirs. His publications included some "speech choir scenes" such as *Flammen-Requiem*, *Prometheus* and *Schmiede am Feuer* (Ibid, 72–77).

[7] Similar opinions among theatre critics could be heard in the 1980s and 1990s when Einar Schleef reintroduced the choir to the stage (see Behrens 2003: 175). Even an expert on elocution such as Victor Klemperer thought that the speech choir had been introduced to the stage by Max Reinhardt but penetrated "into general consciousness"

primary forces of choral speaking in Germany were, from 1919, the Social Democratic workers' and cultural movement and the Catholic youth groups, in addition to elementary and secondary schools. As early as the second half of the 1920s, as social and economic conditions temporarily stabilized in Germany, choirs began losing their significance, only to be briefly revived by the National Socialist youth and *Thingspiel* movements after 1933. It was precisely in the years in which the Hitler regime became firmly established, i.e. after 1936, that choirs were declared undesirable by the Nazi authorities and survived only as an instructional aid in schools.

A historian of speech training, Maximilian Weller, wrote in retrospect in 1956 "that the 'choral speech movement' from approximately 1920 onwards was one of those fashions about whose rise and fall and deeper causes sociologists continue to be in the dark. When, from about 1935, speech choirs began melting away like snow in sunlight, it was mainly due to the recognition that gradually dawned on people of the absurdity and stylistic inconsistencies that the artistic ambitions of choral speaking actually embodied… The result was the non-viable hybrid product of chanting or even droning that acoustically flattened the modulations, blocks of words and semantic accents that distinguish the German language" (Weller 1957: 218). Christian Winkler, West Germany's preeminent specialist in the study of speech, took the same line as Weller when he wrote with satisfaction that: "the spoken-word choir, which was so cultivated in the 1920s and 30s… is now, thank God, in its dying breaths" (1969: 522). The choir was unjustifiable, both artistically and for speech training, Winkler wrote: "Even when there is no shouting, the vaunted mass psychological effects that prop up those weaker in expression seem to me rather questionable in their educational value" (ibid.). As a medium for expressing lyric recitations, the choir was utterly out of the question, according to Winkler. Poetry, he wrote, must be rendered solely by the voice of one individual. The subjectivity of the lyric self cannot tolerate collective embodiment, he argued (Winkler 1969: 522). Of course, his argument contrasted with those of other speech academics and educators (Heinrichs, online source: 34).

After 1949, in the early years of the Federal Republic, spoken-word choirs were mistrusted as a medium of mass psychological identification because, through their manipulation by the political left and right in the Weimar Republic, they had once and for all lost their innocence and become regarded as standard-bearers of political collectivism.[8] The choir was especially opposed by those practitioners of

only "once the National Socialists had put it at the service of their street propaganda" (Klemperer 1989: 580).

[8] Cultural critics such as Adorno expanded this suspicion to singing choirs as well (1984: 813–814).

elocution training who had joined the Nazi camp with flying colours in 1933 (including Maximilian Weller and Christian Winkler). Their formally aesthetic verdicts were, however, blind toward the peculiar vitality of this genre of communal declamation, which should not be prematurely declared extinct. "The speech choir has become popular. What would the Six Days Races be without a speech choir! What would a wild gathering be without a calming or boisterous speech choir!" wrote Bruno Schönlank (cited in Clark 1984: 182), a prominent advocate of the workers' choral speech movement as early as 1930. Today too, choirs can be heard every weekend during church services, at soccer matches and other sporting events when fans want to fire up their teams and mock the opposition – at political street demonstrations including the Monday demonstrations in Leipzig in 1989 ("Wir sind das Volk!"), on Cairo's Tahrir Square in 2011, during the Occupy Movement's "Rose Parade" in New York in 2012 – and, increasingly, being used once again for artistic purposes on theatre stages.

Examining the uses and differing justifications for the speech choir in the first third of the 20th century, one should brace for some surprising insights. To begin with, the sheer diversity of the phenomenon is startling. By 1933, what we summarily aggregate under the term *Sprechchor* (*speech choir*) had already branched out into various sub-genres (according to Türk 1933: 10; Peuler 1932b: XIV):

a) Outright mass speech, in which a collective recites certain political slogans in unison for agitational purposes on the street and in arenas;

b) Speech choirs divided into an individual speaker and subchoirs, as was the rule for choral speaking training with classical poetry in schools, as well as what was required by most compositions in the Social Democratic choral speaking movement, by Kurt Eisner, Ernst Toller and Bruno Schönlank. The formal role models were the antiphonies of classical Greek drama and the Catholic liturgy;

c) Speech choirs that integrate passages of both choral *Sprechgesang* and singing into their repertoire, in the sense of a "unified duality (Zweieinigkeit) of the speech and musical choir", as Schönlank postulated at proletarian ceremonies during the Weimar Republic (cited in Roedemeyer 1926: 74);[9]

d) Speech choirs augmented primarily by percussion and, in isolated cases, wind instruments or instrumental preludes and intermezzos with which symphonies of choral speaking could be performed;[10]

[9] Incidentally, the workers' singing choirs were both organisationally and artistically independent of the workers' speech choirs, even if individual artists such as Hermann Scherchen were active in both fields. See Noltenius (ed.) 1992: 29.

[10] These included the scoring of Schönlank's Frühlingsmysterium through Heinz Thiessen's Kantate für Sprechchor, Gesangschor und Orchester op.36 (Johanesson

e) Combinations of speech- and movement choirs[11], as had been cultivated from the second half of the 1920s and used e.g. in Bruno Schönlank's *Der gespaltene Mensch* (Will and Burns 1982: 198; see photographs of the performance in Hamburg's Stadtpark in 1929 in Clark 1984: 128) or in performances of *The Persians* by the Berlin University Speech Choir under Wilhelm Leyhausen at mass events;

f) The speech choir play or "choral melodrama" (Johannesson 1929: 57) in which the speech- and movement choir used theatrical means of expression (Bethge 1926: 28) along with musical ones;

g) The speech choral opera, the idea of which emerged in the 1920s and came to fruition e.g. in the "antiquity operas" of Carl Orff after 1945;

h) Speech choir revues, which were used toward the end of the 1920s, primarily for political and agitational purposes.[12]

This diversity of manifestations and adaptability spanning various media gives a hint of the aesthetic potential that speech choirs could unfold when combined with other means of artistic expression. There were essentially four societal contexts in which they appeared in public, beginning in 1901: in circles of the workers' movement and leftist political parties from 1919, especially the USPD and SPD, the Catholic youth movement, schools and universities, and finally on theatre stages and literary-musical settings. In this paper, the attention will be focussed on speech choirs in theatre and in literary-musical projects. The aforementioned, no less relevant and important aspects of the usage of speech choirs have not yet been studied and would require much more space.

II. Speech Choirs as a Medium of Artistic Expression in the Literary and Musical Avant-Garde

In the heyday of the workers' choral speech movement around 1925, the Social Democratic bard of choral speaking, Bruno Schönlank, claimed that bourgeois speech choirs ailed from the fact "that they were not carried by feelings and emotions that forced spectators to experience things as a community, and therefore remained merely artistic" (cited in Clark 1984: 180). Schönlank's dismissal of the exclusively artistic aspect was only partially justified. He disregarded the vibrant choral speaking movements in Catholic youth groups as well as in schools. Finally, he failed to recognize

1927: 39).

[11] A definition of the movement choir has been given by Rudolf von Laban: "numbers of people joined in using choreographed movement together, with varying degrees of personal expression"; see Green, internet source (Note of the Editor).

[12] Fragments of various works for speech choir were assembled, with music, singing, quasi-cabaret dialogues and filmic background projections (see Johannesson 1929: 68).

that speech choirs possessed a peculiar vitality precisely when they primarily pursued aesthetic goals. Their genesis in the 20th century took place under artistic auspices.

Beginning around the year 1900, the first impulses for reviving speech choirs as a medium of artistic expression came from the world of academia, especially philologists and classic studies scholars. Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, a Hellenist scholar at the University of Berlin, called for performances of classical dramas with a contemporary, not ancient, character. This would include a modern use of the chorus (Flashar 1989: 655). A production of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* in a new translation by Wilamowitz by the Academic Club for Art and Literature in the Berliner Theatre found great acclaim. The choir was partly recruited from Wilamowitz's students; professional actors and theatre professionals occupied the main roles, including Max Reinhardt as Teiresias. By popular demand the performance was repeated twice. The "unison speaking of the choir," as Wilamowitz had called for, "achieved a great effect by balancing the male voices in a tenor and basso section each" (ibid.: 657).

Director Max Reinhardt (1873–1943) absorbed such impulses on a grand scale. He was seeking new forms of expression to be able to transcend the Naturalism cultivated at the Deutsches Theatre by Otto Brahm (Baur 1999). In 1900 he directed the classical dramas *Antigone* and the *Oresteia*, energizing the action onstage through a combination of mass- and individual movement, lighting and sound, and stage design and costumes. For the choral segments of the *Oresteia*, "choral speech in unison was used according to the requirements of Wilamowitz and, through the instrumental music of (Max) Schilling, rose up to a new artform of choral melodrama" (Flashar 1989: 662). Two choral leaders who stepped out of the choral collective recited some of the partially spoken and partially sung choral passages (Flashar 1989: 666).

The encounter with Hugo von Hofmannsthal only reinforced Reinhardt's preoccupation with classical tragedy and choral speaking. He directed "*Oedipus the King* in 1910 (in Hofmansthal's translation), first in Munich's Musikfesthalle and then in Zirkus Schumann in Berlin (with 30 performances) with triumphant success" (Flashar 1989: 679). The former venue in Munich held 3,000 spectators; the Zirkus Schumann on Berlin's Schiffbauerdamm even a maximum of 5,000. This would also be the venue for Reinhardt's *Oresteia* by Aeschylus in 1911. Alongside the 27-man choir of Theban elders the stage was also occupied by a 500-strong "crowd". "The choir, as an endless mass of humanity, remained moaning and lamenting, and accompanied by optical and acoustic effects… throughout the entire performance onstage. In the age of incipient mass behavior, the entire

crowd belonged onstage to vividly convey the entire nation's tragedy" (Flashar 1989: 682).

With seating for nearly 6,000, the renovated Grosses Schauspielhaus on Schiffbauerdamm, which emerged from Zirkus Schumann, was reopened for Reinhardt's 1919 production of the *Oresteia*, with Alexander Moissi playing Orestes (Will and Burns 1982: 170). The theatre's stage was practically custom-made for speech choirs. An additional enclosure and a stage that stretched out into the audience seating made it possible, unlike in the more standard, box-shaped theatre design, to "establish a community of participating citizens and compatriots who both carry and are carried away by" the performance (Baron 1919: 1). Reinhardt also combined the speech- and movement choir. "The gradations of volume in the unison speaking, the beginning of a movement in the front choir rows that would then seize the entire choir (of up to 500 members!) and then the audience, the beginnings of the speech, its rise and echo all belonged to the practices of facial and vocal expression that Reinhardt set a standard for in his production of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*" (Will and Burns 1982: 189). The *Oresteia* had a run of no less than 74 performances (Flashar 1989: 683).[13]

After 1920 Reinhardt no longer produced classical dramas with choral speaking for the stage. Yet echoes of the spectacles he created could be found in the political theatre of Erwin Piscator (see Bendel 2004, online edition: 9), as well as in Expressionist dramas where speech choirs were occasionally used, such as the plays of Ernst Toller or Alfred Wolfenstein's *Die Nackten* (1st version 1917, 2nd version 1923).[14] In Expressionist theatre however, the choir lost its status as a protagonist and became only a secondary participant.

The speech choir was also given central importance in Bertolt Brecht's theatrical works in 1929 and 1930, such as in his *Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis* (1929) with a "studied choir" and four pilots with speaking roles in chorus, in the two "school operas" *Der Jasager* and *Der Neinsager* (1929/39) with a large choir that recited a well-known passage, *Wichtig zu lernen vor allem ist Einverständnis*, in *Der Brotladen* (1929/30) and finally the "educational play" *Die Maßnahme* (1929/30), in which four agitators speaking in choir face a "control choir" or party tribunal (see Baur 1999: 49–74). It is

[13] Reinhardt wanted to bring viewers, as Flashar writes, "through a kind of esthetic hedonism [...] to another level and to convey theatre to them not as a moral institution but as a space for experiences of festive excess, including neural sensations" (1989: 685). See the essays published in a volume on the occasion of the theatre's grand opening (*Das große Schauspielhaus* 1920).

[14] Wolfenstein's work has "a 'Choir of the Party of the Standing' (i.e. landowners), a 'Choir of the Stepping' (bankers), a 'Chorus of the Running' (Socialists) and a 'Choir of the Poor'" (see Will and Burns 1982: 189).

no coincidence that these dramas culminate in Brecht's programmatic anti-individualism and move toward Leninist party doctrines in which, on the other hand, he rigorously explores the dogmas of distanced theatre (*Verfremdung*) and "destroys" individual figures with their individual psychologies.[15]

Brecht returned to the subject while in Danish exile in summer 1936, after reading in the newspaper that Reich Youth Leader Baldur von Schirach had banned the speech choir in the Hitler Youth because of its "unyouthful form." According to these reports, von Schirach wanted to prevent "people who might otherwise be industrious compatriots from forcing so-called 'poetry' upon the populace, even though nature had denied them any kind of artistic ability" (Schirach 1936; cited in Brecht 1993: 626). Brecht then wrote a sonnet originally titled *Vorschlag, Formen für Sprechchöre vorzubereiten* but which he finally named *Als Hitler den Sprechchor verbot*:

Vom Feinde muß man sich belehren lassen!
Genossen, wenn ihr heut das Blatt aufschlagt
Lest ihr: er hat den Sprechchor untersagt.
Da heißt's, sich mit dem Sprechchor jetzt befassen.

Er scheint ihn nicht zu lieben, also vor!
Übt euch im Sprechchor! Da er ihn doch haßt!
Für uns ist passend grad, was ihm nicht paßt.
Er will nicht Sprechchor? Also sprecht im Chor.

Das muß nicht einstudiert sein und braucht nicht Musik!
Das muß nicht lang sein, es genügt ein Wort.
Verfaßt und eingeübt in einem Augenblick!

Es fangen wenige an und viele fahren fort!
S'ist schlecht für ihn, wenn ihr im Sprechchor sprecht
Und gut für euch, Genossen: er hat recht.

Now one's being instructed by the foe!
Comrades, when you open the paper today
You'll read: he banned the speech choir.
That means: let us consider the speech choir.

He seems not to like it, so let's go!
Rehearse in your choir, because he hates it!
If it doesn't suit him, it certainly suits us.
He doesn't want a speech choir? Then speak in a choir.

It needs no study and needs no music!
It need not be long, one word is enough.
Composed and rehearsed in one moment!

Few begin it, and many continue!
It's bad for him when you speak in a choir
And good for you, comrades: he's right.

(Translation by Nicolas Kumanoff/Berlin; Brecht 1993a: 327).

[15] In a later note by Brecht (1940) the stance is much more differentiated: "Principally, different characters in a play assemble into a choir when certain common interests (including perceived ones) are to be given expression. One

This formally constructed sonnet is like a song in the darkness to raise the spirits of the listener or reader. Where could there still have been groups within the organized labour movement in Germany that could have publicly expressed their demands with the help of a choir? Where were the few to begin it and the many to continue? Where were the listeners who could have been persuaded by the mass speech in unison? Brecht's poem was illusionary and out of season because it postulates certain means of influence and effect for political verse and collective speaking that had long since vanished. The social and political underpinnings of the workers' choral speech movement of the Weimar Republic had been demolished, making this sonnet seem like an act of desperate hope despite better knowledge.

The popularity of speech choirs around 1930 was not limited to theatre; it was also echoed in the music of the time. Compositions for musical speech choirs were produced, e.g. Heinz Thiessen's Cantata for Speech Choir, Choir and Orchestra Op. 36 to the text of Bruno Schönlank's *Frühlingsmysterium* (Johannesson 1927: 39). One musical curiosity was Ernst Toch's Fuge aus der Geographie für Sprechchor (1930), which was performed as part of Berlin's Festival of Contemporary Music and recorded (now unfortunately lost) on gramophone record. The piece is composed as a fugue for a four-part speech choir, reciting rhythmic geographical names into a fugue theme: *Ratibor! / Und der Fluss Missisippi und die Stadt Honolulu und der See Titicaca; / der Popocatepetl liegt nicht in Kanada, sondern in Mexiko, Mexiko, Mexiko*.

The mostly dactylic and anapaestic meter is rhythmically interrupted in "Popocatepetl" by Sprechgesang in triplets. The piece is composed along the strict principles of the art of the fugue and demands a substantial level of rhythmic coordination when performed. Since its premiere, Toch's spoken fugue has enjoyed undiminished popularity around the world – as shown by a glance at YouTube, where, as of the end of 2014, multiple videos of the piece had been viewed more than 200,000 times in total.

The work of the German-Russian composer Wladimir Vogel (1896–1984), a pupil of Ferruccio Busoni, also gave prominent place to the musical speech choir. He used a polyphonous choir in 1930 in his oratorio *Wagadus Untergang durch die Eitelkeit. Dramma-Oratorio*, which was based on a Kabyle story. During the 1930s Vogel collaborated closely with a Brussels speech choir under the direction of Madeleine Thevenot. In works from his later Swiss exile he also

individual can stand in very different choirs, i.e. with always-changing groups of people. […] Choirs should not be rigid. There should not be two rigid groups: One that instructs from the beginning and another that is instructed all the way to the end. Choirs should be able to grow and shrink and change" (Brecht 1993a: 675).

used choirs together with orchestras, solo and choral singers, such as in *Thyl Claes* (1941/42) or the drama-oratorio *Flucht* with texts by Robert Walser and Soma Morgenstern (Oesch 1967). From 1951 in Zurich he had a chamber speech choir directed by Ellen Widmann at his disposal, consisting of amateurs and actors, which took part in theatre and opera performances and developed "communal choral speaking that, instead of exhausting itself in uniformly chanted monotony, should sound free-flowing and with natural emphasis" (Jauslin, internet source).[16]

These aesthetic innovations of a musically composed speech choir found resonance in the spoken operas of Carl Orff (1895–1982). In many respects these represent the late apotheosis of the idea of the speech choir opera, which had already been formulated in the 1920s. Foremost among these is his opera *Antigone* (1946), which he begun working on in the early 1940s based on Friedrich Hölderlin's translation of Sophocles. Orff uses Hölderlin's often-erratic translation to make audible the archaic and foreign aspects of Sophocles' language, as many 20th century philosophers and artists considered Hölderlin the ideal interpreter for the archaic side of ancient Greek poetry. Orff has the translated verse of Hölderlin's *Antigone* chanted stiffly and mask-like in a thoroughly rhythmic *Sprechgesang* against "the dark sounds of xylophones, metallophones, cymbals, drums and tympani in the background". The word groups are "independent of the rhythmic structure of the music ordered according to beat. Syncopation confirms this rigid structure […] the emotional element is subdued" (Komma 1955–1956: 214). Orff strives for an overlap of word, sound and movement onstage, as he is convinced that Hölderlin succeeded in "realizing the *musiké* unity of Greek words and verse fixed according to long and short in the medium of the German language" (Thomas 1955). Here a "Greek tragedy transposed into German" was supposed to be "reawakened from the spirit of the music" (Komma 1955–1956: 217).

Unmistakably, however, the melodic clichés applied to the lines of *Sprechgesang* and the isolated expressive breakouts from it borrow much from the singing style of Richard Strauss' *Elektra* and *Salome*. Orff's *Antigone* is aesthetically less homogeneous than its concealed models, Igor Stravinsky's *Les Noces* and *Oedipus Rex* (1928), which did not use speech choirs. While here the masked element is kept up all the way into the piece's melodic character and, through the selection of a dead language, i.e. Latin, the story

[16] Founded in 1951, the Kammersprechchor Zürich was originally intended for the stage (see Brang 2007–2008: 124). Up until very recently, this choir was making its reputation with richly diverse productions. Its performed texts stretch from Gottfried Keller and Conrad Ferdinand Meyer to Christian Morgenstern, Franz Kafka and Ernst Jandl.

of Oedipus takes on an impenetrable foreignness, Orff's *Antigone* yields an ultimately unsatisfactory hybrid of the archaic and the modern. It unwittingly demonstrates that in the modern world there can be no return to ancient Greek *musiké*, not least because only at the price of monotonous reciting can the German language allow listeners to forget that it possesses an accentuative rhythm, not a quantitative one.[17]

Arnold Schönberg also used a speech choir in his opera *Moses und Aron* (1929–1934). Choral speaking voices arise here together with six singing solo voices to embody the voice from the burning bush in the opening scene. The all-powerful voice of God could not be represented more effectively than through this acoustic montage of spatial sound. Schönberg even considered broadcasting these voices through telephones and loudspeakers from the backstage area into the auditorium (Schönberg 1984: X). Since 1945, following the example of *Moses und Aron*, speech choirs have become an established element in contemporary music, used whenever a pronounced sense of political or religious community requires prominence, for example in Luigi Nono's oratorio *Epitaffio per Federico García Lorca* (1951–53), which takes references from the political choirs of the 1920s. Consisting of episodes from the Spanish Civil War, with slogans recited sometimes in unison, sometimes in various choral parts, it sets a strong activist political stance,[18] much like the vibrant street scenes of his opera *Intolleranza* (1961), with its traits of political and social protest or, in a completely different vein, in the opera of his pupil Helmut Lachenmann, *Das Mädchen mit den Schwefelhölzern* (1997). In Lachenmann's opera, a political text – Gudrun Ensslin's letter from prison to the RAF's sympathizers – is recited from a collective first-person perspective, but by a polyphonous whispering choir that emphasizes not the "what" of the statement, but the "how"

[17] Carl Orff composed the opera in exchange with his friend, the Greek-German musicologist Thrasybulos Georgiades. In an essay, the latter argued that Orff's Antigone opera was "'only' artistically and interpretationally worthwhile" if a "relationship to the ancient work is assumed". Its value comes from being an interpretation of a Greek tragedy from the horizon of the present, mediated by Hölderlin, he wrote (see Georgiades 1977: 231).

[18] Nono used mixed choirs that were sometimes directed in counterpoint in the 2nd part of *Epitaffio per Federico García Lorca Nr.1 (Espana en el corazón)* on a text by Pablo Neruda (La Guerra, 1936), as well as in *Epitaffio per Federico García Lorca Nr. 3 (Memento. Romanze de la Guardia civil espanola)* on a text by Lorca. It cannot be ruled out that his teacher Hermann Scherchen, who during the 1920s himself directed speech choirs at workers' events, turned Nono's attention to this medium of expression. Later, Nono incorporated political, trade union choirs with workers from steelmaker Italsider in Genoa into his composition for 4-channel audiotape and soprano, *La fabbrica illuminata* (1964). It is not by coincidence that comparable works are absent from his later works, even if his *Prometeo* (1981–84), his magnum opus, repeatedly includes individual speaking voices alongside choral singing voices.

of its material presentation, like a final echo of the political harnessing of choral speaking in the history of leftist liberation movements.[19]

Here, as in other examples, the vocal and lingual sound of choral speaking is used both as a textual interpretation that conveys meaning, and to expand the spectrum of vocal expression, compelling the listener to reflect not only on what but also how something is being said. Moreover, in this way vocal sounds are incorporated into an instrumental environment and subjected to similar principles of composition. Moving forward from the Schönberg School, the post-1945 new music thereby opens up the spectrum of vocal expressions of sound beyond that of the singing voice. It does so not only for solo voices but for the choir as well.[20]

In the past two decades, an unexpected and sensational revival of the speech choir has taken place on German theatre stages. The driving force behind its rebirth was the author and playwright Einar Schleef (1944–2001; see Schmidt 2010: 9–33; Behrens 2003). After experimenting with choirs in his productions at Frankfurt's Schauspielhaus theatre (1985–1990), Schleef radicalized his ideas of a comprehensive theatre of the speaking choir in his later works, including *Ein Sportstück* (Vienna 1998), *Der Golem in Bayreuth* (Vienna 1999) and *Verratenes Volk* (Berlin 2000). All the while he remained unmoved by accusations fired off by critics and fellow writers that this was an anachronism reminiscent of Nazi mass rituals (Behrens 1973: 175). In his long, autobiographical essay *Droge Faust Parsifal* (1997), Schleef described working with choirs as a cornerstone of theatre's revitalisation. In opposition to the individualistic form of theatre derived from Shakespeare and Goethe, it was time to revive the dimension of tragedy as a collective fate by using the choir, he wrote (Schleef 1997: 13).

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[19] Lachenmann's whispering choir (Nr. 15: *Litanei*) recites a text by RAF terrorist Gudrun Ensslin, "Der kriminelle, der wahnsinnige, der selbstmörder…" Lachenmann finds an innovative form for the monstrosity of this text. Instead of a linear choral recitation, he composes a phonetic articulation, divided into various individual voices, of the text's component sounds. The listener's perception then pieces these together into a unified linguistic message. It creates the impression of a ghostly inner voice accompanying the text's rhythm that dissolves into a multitude of inner voices, as in an episode of paranoia: "Ihr tod ist ausdruck der rebellion der zertrümmerten subjekte gegen ihre zertrümmerung" (the quotations in German language have been given without capitalisation of nouns, according to the text in its original version; *Note of the Editor*). The political effect that Ensslin intended in her letter is deconstructed by Lachenmann, partly in regard to its materiality.

[20] These works include Wolfgang Rihm's *Départ* for mixed choir, speech choir and 22 players (1988) on a text by Arthur Rimbeaud. While the mixed choir sings vocalisations, the speech choir belts out its rejection of traditional culture in a virtually ecstatic manner.

Other German-language theatre directors including Nicolas Steman and Volker Lösch have also used choirs recently. Lösch, for example, has assembled collectives of the socially disadvantaged – prostitutes, the homeless and welfare recipients – who articulate their political and social needs onstage. Beyond the realm of theatre, Lösch has appeared at political demonstrations – such as those opposing the demolition of Stuttgart's Main Station in 2011 – with amateur choirs that, under his direction, shouted their demands at political leaders and the public to substantial effect. In general, spoken-word choirs are limited to acting in the first person plural. They are "we" speakers and are suitable anywhere that a group seeks to make itself heard through collective slogans and protest.

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ГОВОРНИ ХОРОВИ У ПОЗОРИШТИМА И КЊИЖЕВНОМУЗИЧКИМ ДЕЛИМА ЦЕНТРАЛНЕ ЕВРОПЕ У ПРВОЈ ТРЕЋИНИ XX ВЕКА

(Резиме)

Говорни хорови појавили су се као изданак хорских окупљања ширег омладинског музичког и певачког покрета у првој половини XX века. Та пракса доживљава свој кратки и усковитлани успон у првим годинама после Првог светског рата, док се нашироко чуо позив на „духовни ангажман појединца у оквиру заједнице". Главни актер тога покрета био је нараштај експресиониста који су, у складу са својим уверењима, раскинули с индивидуализмом епохе либералног грађанства, стремећи, како се у писаној речи онога времена наводи, „колективном изразу целокупног човечанства" (Р. М. К.). Говорни хор чини се идеалним средством тога израза. Позоришни редитељи, укључујући Макса Рајхарда (Max Reinhardt), Ервина Пискатора (Erwin Piscator) и Бертолда Брехта (Bertolt Brecht), експериментисали су с говорним хоровима у својим продукцијама античких трагедија и модерних политичких драма. Заузврат, та искра је подстакла независност говорнохорских покрета од позоришта, уз подршку Социјалистичке демократске партије, с једне стране, и омладинских група под окриљем Католичке цркве, с друге. Поред музичких хорова, говорни хор употребљаван је у циљу јачања заједница и афирмације политичко-идеолошких ставова. У међувремену, говорни хорови доживљавају процват у оквиру основних и средњих школа, као средства обуке у говору и рецитовању.

Повремено изражено мишљење да је говорне хорове превасходно неговала *Хитлерова омладина* и да су били гурнути у службу нацистичких националиста и расистичке пропаганде, историјски посматрано тачно је само делимично. Главни носиоци говорних хорова у Немачкој били су, од 1919. године, раднички социјалдемократски покрет и културни покрет група католичке омладине, као и основних и средњих школа.

Популарност говорних хорова око 1930. није било ограничена само на позоришта, већ је имала одјека и у музици тога времена. Композиције за говорне хорове писали су композитори попут Хајнца Тисена (Heinz Thiessen), Арнолда Шенберга (Arnold Schönberg), Ернста Тоха (Ernst Toch), Карла Орфа (Carl Orff), Владимира Фогела (Wladimir Vogel/Владимир Рудольфович Фогель), Луиђија Нона (Luigi Nono), Хелмута Лахенмана (Helmut Lachenmann) и Волфганга Рима (Wolfgang Rihm). Идући корак даље од Шенбергове школе, нова музика из времена после 1945. на тај начин отвара читав спектар звучних вокалних израза који превазилазе сферу певачког гласа – како солистичког, тако и хорског певања.

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